

The BLACK BOX

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Novellized from the Photo Play of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company.

SYNOPSIS:

Sanford Quest, master criminologist of the world, finds that in bringing to justice Macdougall, the murderer of Lord Ashleigh's daughter, he has but just entered a life-and-death contest with a mysterious master criminal. Engaged by Professor Ashleigh, Lord Ashleigh's brother, to recover the stolen skeleton of an anthropoid ape, hurried to Mrs. Rheinholdt's reception, where her diamonds have been torn from her throat by a pair of hands without arms or body, a black box later appears from nowhere in his rooms and a note contained in it, signed by the arm, the less hands, sarcastically suggests that the Rheinholdt diamonds and the skeleton may be hidden together. While Laura, Quest's secretary, shadows Craig, the professor's valet, Quest and Lenora, his assistant, find the skeleton in a hut in the professor's garden, and discover there an inhuman creature, half monkey and half man. As the professor explains, the hut is set afire and the monkey-man and skeleton are destroyed in the flames. In Quest's rooms the Rheinholdt diamonds suddenly reappear, enclosed in a second black box with a note signed by the threatening hands.

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

AN OLD GRUDGE.

CHAPTER X.

Sanford Quest was smoking his after-breakfast cigar with a relish somewhat affected by the measure of his perplexities. Early though it was, Lenora was already in her place, bending over her desk, and Laura, who had just arrived, was busy divesting herself of her coat and hat. Quest watched the latter impatiently.

"Well?" he asked.

Laura came forward, straightening her hair with her hands.

"No go," she answered. "I spent the evening in the club, and I talked with two men who knew Craig, but I couldn't get on to anything. From all I could hear of the man, respectability is his middle name."

"That's the professor's own idea," Quest remarked grimly.

"We're fairly up against it, boss," Laura sighed. "The best thing we can do is to get on to another job. The Rheinholdt woman has got her jewels back, or will have at noon today. I bet she won't worry about the thief. Then the professor's moldy old skeleton was returned to him, even if it was burned up afterwards. I should take on something fresh."

"Can't be done," Quest replied shortly.

"Look here, girls, your average intellects are often apt to hit upon the truth, when a man who sees too far ahead goes wrong. Rule Craig out. Any other possible person occur to you? Speak out, Lenora. You've something on your mind, I can see."

"I'm afraid you'll laugh at me," she began tentatively.

"Won't hurt you if I do," Quest replied.

"I can't help thinking of Macdougall," Lenora continued falteringly. "He has never been recaptured. I don't know whether he's dead or alive. He had a perfect passion for jewels. If he is alive, he would be desperate and would attempt anything."

Quest smoked in silence for a moment.

"I guess the return of the jewels squelched the Macdougall theory," he remarked. "He wouldn't be likely to part with the stuff when he'd once got his hands on it. However, I always meant, when we had a moment's spare time, to look into that fellow's whereabouts. We'll take it on straight away. Can't do any harm."

"I know the section boss on the railway at the spot where he disappeared," Laura announced.

"Then just take the train down to Mountways—that's the nearest spot—and get busy with him," Quest directed. "Try and persuade him to loan us the gang's handcar to go down the line. Lenora and I will come on in the automobile."

"Take you longer," Lenora remarked as she moved off to put on her jacket. "The cars do it in a quarter of an hour."

"Can't help that," Quest replied. "Mrs. Rheinholdt's coming here to identify her jewels at twelve o'clock, and I can't run any risk of there being no train back. You'd better be making good with the section boss. Take plenty of bills with you."

"Sure! That's easy enough," Laura promised him. "I'll be waiting for you."

She hurried off and Quest commenced his own preparations. From his safe he took one of the small black lumps of explosive to which he had once before owed his life, and fitted it carefully in a small case with a coil of wire and an electric lighter. He looked at his revolver and recharged it. Finally he rang the bell for his confidential valet.

"Ross," he asked, "who else is there here today besides you?"

"No one today, sir."

"Just as well, perhaps," Quest observed. "Listen, Ross, I am going out now for an hour or two, but I shall be back at midday. Remember that Mrs. Rheinholdt and Inspector French are to be here at twelve o'clock. If by any chance I should be a few minutes late, ask them to wait. And, Ross, a young woman from the Salvation

the spot where he had left the car. The chauffeur, who saw him coming, started up and climbed to his seat. Quest took his place.

"Drive to the office," he ordered.

The man slipped in his clutch. They were in the act of gliding off when there was a tremendous report. They stopped short. The man jumped down and looked at the back seat.

"Blowout," he remarked laconically. Quest frowned.

"How long will it take?"

"Four minutes," the man replied. "I've got another wheel ready. That's the queerest blowout I ever saw, though."

The two men leaned over the tire. Suddenly Quest's expression changed. His hand stole into his hip pocket.

"Tom," he explained, "that wasn't a blowout at all. Look here!"

He pointed to the small level hole. Almost at once he stood back and the sunshine flashed upon the revolver clutched in his right hand.

"That was a bullet," he continued. "Someone fired at that tire. Tom, there's trouble about."

The man looked nervously around. "That's a rifle bullet, sure," he muttered.

"Get on the wheel as quick as you can," Quest directed. "Here, I'll give you a hand."

He stooped down to unfasten the straps which fastened the spare wheel. It was one of his rare lapses, realized a moment too late. Almost in his ears came the hoarse cry:

"Hands up, governor! Hands up this second or I'll blow you to hell!"

Quest glanced over his shoulder and looked into the face of Red Gallagher, raised a little above the level of the road. A very ugly little revolver was pointed directly at Quest's heart.

"My mate's got you covered on the other side of the road, too. Hands up, both of you, or we'll make a quick job of it."

Quest shrugged his shoulders, threw his revolver into the road and obeyed. As he did so, the other man stole out from behind a bush and sprang for the chauffeur, who under cover of the car was stealing off. There was a brief struggle, then the dull thud of the railway man's rifle falling on the chauffeur's head. He rolled over and lay in the road.

"Pitch him off amongst the bushes," Red Gallagher ordered. "You don't want anyone who comes by to see. Now lend me a hand with this chap."

"What do you propose to do with me?" Quest asked.

"You'll know soon enough," Red Gallagher answered. "A matter of five minutes' talk to start with. You see that handcar house?"

"Perfectly well," Quest assented. "My eyesight is quite normal."

"Get there then. I'm a yard behind you and my revolver's pointing for the middle of your back."

Quest sprang lightly down from the road, crossed the few intervening yards and stepped into the handcar house.

Gallagher and his mate followed close behind. Quest paused on the threshold.

"It's a filthy dirty hole," he remarked. "Can't we have our little chat out here? Is it money you want?"

Gallagher glanced around. Then with an ugly push of the shoulder he sent Quest reeling into the shed. His great form blocked up the doorway.

"No," he cried fiercely. "It's not money I want this time. Quest, you brute, you dirty bloodhound! You sent me to the pen for five years—you

"I guess so," the other grunted. "Are you going to try and do him in?"

"Now then, you fellows," Horan shouted. "What are you hanging about there for, Red Gallagher? Bring the carriage up. You fellows can have a smoke for an hour. I'm going to take her down the line for a bit."

The two men obeyed and disappeared in the direction of the section house. Quest looked after them curiously.

"That's a big fellow," he remarked. "What did you call him? Red Gallagher? I seem to have seen him before."

"He was the most troublesome fellow on the line once, although he was the biggest worker," the boss replied. "He got five years in the penitentiary and that seems to have taken the spirit out of him."

"I believe I was in the case," Quest observed carelessly.

"That's so! Now then, young ladies," Mr. Horan advised, "hold tight, and here goes!"

They ambled down the line for about half a mile. Then Horan brought them to a standstill.

"This is the spot," he declared. "Now, if you want my impressions you are welcome to them. All the search has been made on the right-hand side here and in New York. I've had my eye on that hill for a long time. My impression is that he hid there."

"I'll take your advice," Quest decided. "We'll spread out and take a little exercise in hill climbing."

"Good luck to you!" the boss exclaimed.

They searched carefully and deliberately for more than half an hour. Then Laura suddenly called out. They looked around to find only her head visible. She scrambled up, muddy and with wet leaves clinging to her skirt.

"Say, that guy of a section boss told me to look out for caves. I've been in one, sure enough! Only just saved myself."

They hurried to where she was. Quest peered into the declivity down which she had slipped. Suddenly he gave vent to a little exclamation. At the same time Laura called out. An inch or two of tweed was clearly visible through the straw leaves. Quest, flat on his stomach, crawled a little way down, took out his electric torch from his pocket and brushed the stuff away. Then he clambered to his feet.

"Our search is over," he declared gravely, "and your troubles, Lenora. That is Macdougall's body."

Lenora's face sank into her hands for a moment. Quest stood on one side while Laura passed her arm around the other girl's waist.

Quest glanced at his watch. "I'll have to get," he said, "but I'll send someone to ask Quest up. Lenora," he added kindly. "Look after her, Laura."

Quest hastened along the road to



"Hands Up, Governor!"

with your cursed prying into other people's affairs. Don't you remember me, eh? Red Gallagher?"

"Of course, I do," Quest replied coolly. "You garroted and robbed an old man and had the spree of your life. The old man happened to be a friend of mine, so I took the trouble to see that you paid for it. Well?"

"Five years of hell, that's what I had," the man continued, his eyes flashing, his face twitching with anger. "Well, you're going to have a little bit more than five years. This shed's been burnt down twice, sparks from passing engines. It's going to be burnt down for the third time."

"Sounds remarkably unpleasant," Quest admitted. "You'd better hurry or the boss will be back."

Gallagher finally slammed the door. Quest heard the heavy footsteps of the two men as they turned toward the section house. He drew a little case from his pocket.

He opened what seemed to be a little mahogany box, looked at the



"The Hut, Professor!"

The Hut is on Fire!"

of black substance inside, closed it up, placed it against the far wall, untwisted the coil, stood back near the door and then pressed the button. The result was extraordinary. The whole of the far wall was blown out and for some distance in front the ground was furrowed up by the explosion. Quest replaced the instrument in his pocket, sprang through the opening and ran for the tower house. Behind him on its way to New York he could see a freight train coming along. He could hear, too, Red Gallagher's roar of anger. It was less than fifty yards, yet as soon as he reached the shelter of the tower the thunder of the freight sounded in Quest's ears. He glanced around. Red Gallagher and his mate were racing almost side by side towards him. He rushed up the narrow stairs into the signal room, tearing open his coat to show his official badge.

"Stop the freight," he shouted to the operator. "Quick, I'm Sanford Quest, detective—special powers from the chief commissioner."

The man moved to the signal. Another voice thundered in his ears. He turned swiftly around. The Irishman's head had appeared at the top of the staircase.

"Drop that signal or I'll blow you into bits," he shouted.

The operator hesitated, dazed.

"Walk towards me," Gallagher shouted. "Look here, you guy, this will show you whether I'm in earnest or not!"

A bullet passed within a few inches of the operator's head. He came slowly across the room. Below they could hear the roar of the freight.

"This ain't your job," the Irishman continued savagely. "We want the cop, and we're going to have him."

Quest had stolen a yard or two nearer during this brief colloquy. Gallagher's mate from behind shouted out a warning just a second too late. With a sudden kick, Quest sent the revolver flying across the room and before the Irishman could recover he struck him full in the face. Notwithstanding his huge size and strength, Gallagher reeled. The operator who had just begun to realize what was happening flung himself bodily against the two thugs. A shot from the tangled mass of struggling limbs whistled past Quest's head as he sprang to the window which overlooked the track. The freight had already almost passed. Quest steadied himself for a supreme effort, crawled out on the little steel bridge and poised himself for a moment. The last car was just beneath. The gap between it and the previous one was slipping by. He set his teeth and jumped on the smooth top.

Back behind the tower Red Gallagher and his mate bent with horrified faces over the body of the signalman.

"What the hell did you want to plug him for?" the latter muttered. "He ain't in the show at all. You've done us, Red, he's cooked!"

Red Gallagher staggered to his feet. Already the horror of the murderer was in his face as he glanced furtively around.

"I never meant to drop him," he muttered. "I got mad at seeing Quest get off. That man's a devil."

"What are we going to do?" the other demanded hoarsely.

"There's the auto," Gallagher shouted. "Come on, old man! I can fix the wheel. If we've got to swing for this job, we'll have something of our own back first."

They crawled to the side of the road. Gallagher's rough, hairy fingers were still trembling, but they knew their job. In a few minutes the wheel was fixed. Churnally but successfully, the great Irishman turned the car around away from the city.

"She's a bummer," he muttered. "I'll make her go when we get the hang of it. Sit tight."

They drove clumsily off, gathering speed at every yard. Behind, in the shadow of the tower, the signalman lay dead. Quest, half way to New York, stretched flat on his stomach, was struggling for life with knees and hands and feet.

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Rheinholdt welcomed the inspector with a beaming smile as he stepped out of his office and approached her automobile.

"How nice of you to be so punctual," Mr. French, she exclaimed, motioning him by her side. "Will you tell the man to drive to Mr. Quest's house in Georgia square?"

The inspector obeyed and took his place in the luxurious limousine.

"Now beautifully punctual we are!" she continued, glancing at the clock.

"Inspector, I am so excited at the idea of getting my jewels back. Isn't Mr. Quest a wonderful man?"

"He's a clever chap, all right," the inspector admitted. "All the same, I'm rather sorry he wasn't able to lay hands on the thief."

"That's your point of view, of course," Mrs. Rheinholdt remarked. "I can think of nothing but having my diamonds back. I feel I ought to go and thank the professor for recommending Mr. Quest."

The inspector made no reply. Mrs. Rheinholdt was suddenly aware that she was becoming a little tactless.

"Of course," she sighed. "It is disappointing not to be able to lay your hands upon the thief. That is where I suppose you must find the interference of an amateur like Mr. Quest a little troublesome sometimes. He gets back the property, which is what the private individual wants, but he doesn't secure the thief, which is, of course, the real end of the case from your point of view."

"It's a queer affair about these jewels," the inspector remarked. "Quest hasn't told me the whole story yet. Here we are on the stroke of time!"

The car drew up outside Quest's house. The inspector assisted his companion to alight and rang the bell at the front door. There was a somewhat prolonged pause. He rang again.

"Never knew this to happen before," he remarked. "That sort of secretary-valet of Mr. Quest's—Ross Brown I think he calls him—is always on the spot." They waited for some time, there was still no answer to their summons. The inspector placed his ear to the keyhole. There was not a sound to be heard. He drew back, a little puzzled. At that moment his attention was caught by the fluttering of a little piece of white material caught in the door. He pulled it out. It was a fragment of white embroidery, and on it were several small stains. The inspector looked at them and looked at his fingers. His face grew suddenly grave.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "that there has been some trouble here. I shall have to take a liberty. If you'll excuse me, Mrs. Rheinholdt, I think it would be better if you waited in the car until I send out for you."

"You don't think the jewels have been stolen again?" she gasped.

The inspector made no reply. He had drawn from his pocket a little pass key and was fitting it into the lock. The door swung open. Once more they were both conscious of that peculiar silence, which seemed to have in it some unnamable quality. He moved to the foot of the stairs and shouted:

"Hello! Anyone there?"

There was no reply. He opened the doors of the two rooms on the right-hand side, where Quest, when he was engaged in any widespread affair, kept a stenographer and a telegraph operator. Both rooms were empty. Then he turned towards Quest's study on the left-hand side. French was a man of iron nerve. No power on earth could have kept back the cry which broke from his lips.

A few feet away from the door was stretched the body of the secretary-valet. On the other side of the room, lying as though she had slipped from the sofa, her head fallen on one side in hideous fashion, was the body of Miss Quigg, the Salvation Army young woman. French set his teeth and drew back the curtains. In the clearer light the disorder of the room was fully revealed. There had been a terrible struggle. Between whom? How?

There was suddenly a piercing shriek. The inspector turned quickly around. Mrs. Rheinholdt, who had disregarded his advice, was standing on the threshold.

"Inspector!" she cried. "What has happened? Oh, my God!"

She covered her face with her hands. French gripped her by the arm. At that moment there was the sound of an automobile stopping outside.

"Keep quiet for a moment," the inspector whispered in her ear. "Pull yourself together, madam. Go to the other end of the room. Don't look then there for a few moments and stay get home as quick as you can."

She obeyed him mutely, pressing her hands to her eyes, shivering in every limb. French, stood back inside the room. He heard the front door open, he heard Quest's voice outside.

"Where the devil are you, Ross?"

There was no reply.

The door was pushed open. Quest entered, followed by the professor and Craig. The inspector stood watching their faces. Quest came to a stand

still before he had passed the threshold. He looked upon the floor and he looked across to the sofa. Then he looked at French.

"My God!" he muttered.

The professor pushed past. He had looked around the room, and gazed at the two bodies with an expression of blank and absolute terror. Then he fell back into Craig's arms.

"The poor girl!" he cried. "Horrible! Horrible! Horrible!"

"Know anything about this?" Quest asked quickly.

"Not a thing," the inspector replied. "We arrived, Mrs. Rheinholdt and I, at five minutes past twelve. There was no answer to our ring. I used my pass key and entered. This is what I found."

Quest stood over the body of his valet for a moment. The man was obviously dead. The inspector took his handkerchief and covered up the head. A few feet away was a heavy paper-weight.

"Killed by a blow from behind," French remarked grimly, "with that little affair. Look here!"

They glanced down at the girl. Quest's eyebrows came together quickly. There were two blue marks upon her throat where a man's thumbs might have been.

"The hands again," he muttered.

The inspector nodded.

"Can you make anything of it?"

"Not yet," Quest confessed. "I must think."

The inspector glanced at him curiously.

"Where on earth have you been to?" he demanded.

"Been to?" Quest repeated.

"Look in the mirror!" French suggested.

Quest glanced at himself. His collar had given way, his tie was torn, a button and some of the cloth had been wrenched from his coat, his trousers were torn and he was covered with dust.

"I'll tell you about my trouble a little later on," he replied. "Say, can't we keep those girls out?"

They were too late. Laura and Lenora were already upon the threshold. Quest swung round toward them.

"Girls," he said, "there has been some trouble here. Go and wait upstairs, Lenora, or sit in the hall."



He Set His Teeth and Jumped.

Laura, you had better telephone to the police station and for a doctor. That's right, isn't it, Inspector?"

"Yes!" the latter assented thoughtfully.

Lenora, white to the lips, staggered a few feet back into the hall. Laura set her teeth and lingered.

"Is that Ross?" she asked.

"It's his body," Quest replied. "He's been murdered here, and the Salvation Army girl who was to come this morning for her check."

Laura turned away half dazed.

"I'd have trusted Ross with my life," Quest continued, "but he must have been alone in the house when the girl came. Do you suppose it was the usual sort of trouble?"

Inspector French stooped down and picked up the paper-weight. Across it was stamped the name of Sanford Quest.

"This yours, Quest?"

"Of course it is," Quest answered. "Everything in the room is mine."

"The girl would fight to defend herself," the inspector remarked slowly, "but she could never strike a man such a blow as your valet died from."

French stooped and picked up a small clock. It had stopped at eleven-fifteen. He looked at it thoughtfully.

"Quest," he went on, "I'll have to ask you a question."

"Why not?" Quest replied looking quickly up.

"Where were you at eleven-fifteen?"

"On tower No. 10 of the New York Central, scrapping for my life," Quest answered grimly. "I've reason to remember it."

Something in the inspector's steady gaze seemed to inspire the criminologist with a new idea. He came a step forward, a little frown upon his forehead.

"Say, French," he exclaimed, "you don't—you don't suspect me of this?"

French was unmoved. He looked Quest in the eyes.

"I don't know," he said.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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